D63

99th Congress
2d Session

COMMITTEE PRINT

ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: A POLICY ANALYSIS AND REVIEW WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

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REPORT

OF THE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON HUNGER
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 1986

Printed for the use of the Select Committee on Hunger

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON : 1986

88-011 O

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LETTER OF TRAN[illegible]MITTAL

U.S. [illegible]
Selec[illegible]ouse of Representatives,
Wash[illegible] Committee on Hunger
[illegible]ington, D.C., September 1, 1986

To Members of the Select Committee on [illegible]unger:

I am pleased to transmit to Committee [illegible]embers the enclosed report, "Enhancing the Effectiveness of the U[illegible]. Government's Foreign Disaster Assistance Program: A Policy Analysis [illegible]nd Review with Recommendations."

I believe this bipartisan report docu[illegible]nts and supports conclusions and recommendations for strengthening [illegible]the foreign disaster assistance program managed by the Agency for Int[illegible]rnational Development. Disasters, both natural and man-made, [illegible] an increasingly heavy human and economic toll. The victims[illegible] taking tend to be the very poor, the malnour[illegible]of disasters disproportionately effective disaster assistance programs[illegible]hed and the hungry. An alleviation and intervention efforts [illegible]is essential for hunger the need for improving this vital ele[illegible] This report clearly establishes program. [illegible]ent of our foreign assistance

Sin[illegible]erely,

MIC[illegible]
Cha[illegible]EY LELAND
[illegible]rman

(III)

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PREFACE

The tragic events of 1984 and 1985 which unfolded across Sub-Saharan Africa, most dramatically in Ethiopia and the Sudan, demonstrated the extreme vulnerability of tens of millions of persons in Africa alone to natural and man-made disaster. Triggered by recurring drought over a three-to-five year period, famine struck, adversely affecting as many as 150 million people, threatening the lives of perhaps thirty million. Grain harvests declined over forty percent in 1984 from the previous year. An unknown number of people perished as a result of the famine; most reliable estimates put the death toll in excess of one million. Ten million Africans were driven from their homes, farms were abandoned, health and education systems were left to deteriorate as the famine spread across the Horn, the Sahel and southern Africa. The world public was shaken by the horror of forty thousand or more Ethiopians desperately crowding into makeshift relief centers -- relief centers offering virtually no food or water, no shelter, no medical assistance.

The African famine catastrophe underscored not only the deepening development crisis overtaking Sub-Saharan Africa, but the inadequacy of the donor community's disaster monitoring and response capability. Twenty African nations had been affected by famine -- outright massive human starvation -- before the United Nations, other international organizations, the United States and other donor governments were in a position to mount effective relief operations. Relief organizations and governments found, after making the commitment to provide relief assistance, that available funding and personnel resources were inadequate for the task at hand and that existing bureaucratic organization did not permit rapid or efficient relief measures to be undertaken. The United States Government was forced to create a new infrastructure to expedite American aid to the famine victims. The United Nations as well found its disaster coordinating agency inadequate for the situation at hand and established a new entity to manage relief efforts.

The disaster assistance capacity of the U.S. Government is of particular concern to the Select Committee on Hunger. Disaster victims are, overwhelmingly, the very poor, the malnourished, the hungry. This is especially true, of course, when examining the phenomenon of famine. And, unfortunately, the specter of recurring famine and massive starvation across Sub-Saharan Africa is only too real. The concern of the Committee is that without fundamental enhancement of the U.S. Government's disaster relief capability, the initial U.S. response would be no more timely or efficient should drought and famine strike again than was the case in 1984.

The Select Committee therefore undertook this review of the U.S. Government's foreign disaster assistance program. This study paralleled a thorough analysis of the UN disaster response program undertaken by the Council on Foreign Relations and the United Nations Association of the United States.

The major findings of the Select Committee study and the primary recommendations for enhancing and improving this vital program follow. It is important to highlight, however, a central factor inhibiting the disaster assistance program. Funding for foreign disaster relief and preparedness programs is currently at levels below that provided when the program was first initiated in 1964. Since 1964, the number of people vulnerable to disaster has vastly multiplied. Since inflation has reduced the purchasing power of the (average 1964, appropriation for disaster assistance by seventy-two perce) annual ent.

Disasters take an enormous toll on development in many co untries. Investments in assistance projects are being threatened. The impact of disasters on those already vulnerable to malnutrition is many times greater than on the general population. An essential aspect of world hunger intervention efforts is appropriate disaster respo nse and disaster preparedness and mitigation capacity. That capa bility of the United States Government is not currently adequate in relationship to the present and future threat of disasters to vulnerable populations.

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INTRODUCTION

Assistance to relieve human suffering as a result of natural or man-made disasters throughout the world has been a longstanding American tradition, reflecting deeply held values of United States citizens. Images of death and destruction in a Latin American city after a major earthquake, or of children dying in Africa as a result of famine, provoke strong emotions among Americans.

Congress made its first foreign disaster appropriation in 1812 when $50,000 worth of food and supplies were delivered to victims of an earthquake in Venezuela. Although foreign aid became institutionalized with the adoption of the Marshall Plan in 1947, foreign disaster assistance remained ad hoc. No central office was responsible for humanitarian relief within the United States Government, and little coordination existed between various government offices and the many American private agencies and international organizations providing relief assistance.

In 1963, when a devastating earthquake hit Yugoslavia, the United States joined the international community in providing relief, with assistance flowing from a variety of federal agencies. From the problems encountered in managing this multi-agency response, the need was identified for one central office to coordinate U.S. Government disaster assistance. A year later the Agency for International Development named its first disaster relief coordinator and established the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance. The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) is an independent office reporting to the AID Administrator, who is the President's Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance. During the years since its inception, OFDA has responded to 811 disasters in 130 countries in which over 2.3 million persons have died and an estimated 803 million people have been affected.

This study is an analysis of the adequacy of the foreign disaster assistance program of the United States Government in providing appropriate response to the threat of natural and man-made disasters to vulnerable populations. In reviewing the need for possible changes in the legislation authorizing and defining U.S. participation in international disaster assistance efforts, three basic factors stand out:

1) The world's population has grown from 3.3 to 5 billion in the two decades since AID became the principal organization responsible for administering U.S. foreign disaster relief and preparedness activities;

2) Inflation has taken a heavy toll on the (average) annual appropriation of $25 million for foreign disaster assistance. The level of goods and services that can be obtained for $25 million has decreased by

seventy-two percent during the twenty-two year history of the disaster assistance program; and

3) While it cannot be stated with certainty that the physical and human destruction caused by disasters has increased, the population vulnerable to disasters has clearly increased dramatically. The United States Government has become involved in an increasing number of disasters in more countries and involved in disasters of increasing complexity and duration.

These factors are the basis of recommendations presented in this study for an enhancement of the foreign disaster assistance program.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis of the functioning of the U.S. Government's foreign disaster assistance program undertaken by the Select Committee leads to several broad conclusions. First, the current level of funding for the disaster assistance program and the established mechanisms to augment funding on a contingent basis are inadequate. Second, the proportion of the disaster assistance appropriation allocated for disaster preparedness activities is inadequate. Third, current risk assessments of developing ("creeping") disaster situations do not permit required mitigation and mobilization efforts. Fourth, current authorization legislation lacks the specificity required to prevent use of the program for non-disaster purposes.

The conclusions lead to the following six recommendations for enhancing the foreign disaster assistance program:

Recommendation: Congress should adjust the annual appropriation of AID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) to account for the impact of inflation on the disaster account and for the enormous increase in the number of people vulnerable to disaster. An appropriation of $50 million is warranted.

Recommendation: Congress should establish a separate periodically replenishable disaster relief contingency fund in the amount of $50 million to remain available until expended and to be used after notification to the appropriate Congressional committees. Establishment of such a contingency fund would eliminate the disruptive transferring of funds from AID development assistance accounts during disaster emergencies.

Recommendation: Congress should mandate that not less than one third of the annual OFDA appropriation be spent on disaster preparedness and mitigation programs.

Recommendation: Congress should consider language amending the Foreign Assistance Act to more definitively specify that disaster preparedness and mitigation considerations should be incorporated into development assistance strategies and projects.

Recommendation: AID should be required to submit periodic risk assessments to the Congress and pertinent Executive Branch departments on creeping disaster situations on a timely basis to allow sufficient mobilization. Such mobilization can reduce both the toll taken by disasters and the expenditures for relief operations.

Recommendation: Congress should consider authorization language more definitively specifying that foreign disaster assistance is intended for the relief of human suffering in affected civilian populations following or preceding disaster occurrences.

The conclusions and recommendations in this study stem from a conviction that most disasters are unsolved development problems that, if not addressed, will continue to take an increasing toll in developing countries, particularly among the most poor, malnourished and hungry populations of these countries. The Select Committee i convinced that enhancements and improvements in the U.S. Government's foreign disaster assistance program are required to meet this threat to growing numbers of already vulnerable people.

DISCUSSION: BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Funding

AID's disaster assistance program traditionally has been provided annual appropriations of $25 million. General reductions in foreign assistance appropriations reduced that funding to $21.5 million for Fiscal Year 1986; FY 1987 funding is likely to be below the $20 million level. In almost every year since the inception of the program, Congress has made supplemental disaster appropriations in excess of the $25 million annual appropriation. A supplemental appropriation of $137.5 million was required in FY 1985 in response to Sub-Saharan Africa's famine relief and rehabilitation requirements.

An increase from $25 million to $50 million for the annual appropriation for the disaster assistance program is recommended because: 1.) the effectiveness of the $25 million appropriation has been seriously eroded by inflation during the period the funding level has remained relatively constant; 2.) the number of people vulnerable to disasters, while not known precisely, has increased greatly; and 3.) AID's experience in administering disaster assistance in nearly one thousand disaster situations reinforces a basic lesson that if additional resources were provided for preparedness and mitigation activities, the human and development toll of disasters could be greatly reduced. It is also clear that more effective disaster preparedness and mitigation programs could ultimately reduce the level of relief assistance required.

During the twenty-two years that AID has formally administered foreign disaster assistance (1964 to the present), inflation has reduced the purchasing power of the U.S. dollar by seventy-two percent. Thus the initial appropriation of $25,000,000 would today purchase only $7.3 million in goods such as food, medicine, tents and the services of technical advisors used in disaster relief programs (see chart). It requires on the average almost $3.50 in 1986 to purchase the same amount of goods the $1.00 would buy in 1964 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index, statistics). Food items most commonly required in relief programs include wheat, wheat flour and nonfat powdered milk; their comparative dollar prices over the past two decades are as follows:

	FY 1966	FY 1986	Price Increase
Wheat (MT)	$60.90	$137.98	127%
Wheat Flour (MT)	$72.01	$191.37	166%
Nonfat Dry Milk (lbs)	$10.25 (avg.)	$29.50	172%

(USDA, Division of Trade and Economic Information, Foreign Agricultural Service.)

The effective reduction of the disaster assistance appropriation by seventy-two percent contrasts with a forty-five percent global population growth in the years 1965-1985 and an even higher growth rate in several disaster-prone regions. The following data illustrate that growth.

Country	Population Millions 1965	1985	Current rate of Population Growth
Bangladesh	58	101	2.6%
India	485	759	1.7%
Ethiopia	27	44	2.8%
Haiti	4	7	2.6%
Mexico	44	79	2.4%
El Salvador	3	6	3.1%

City	1965	1985	Current rate of Population Growth
Mexico	7.0	18.1	3.3%
Calcutta	6.2	11.0	2.7%
Karachi	2.4	6.8	3.7%
Lagos	1.0	3.6	5.7%
Cairo	4.6	8.5	3.3%

The number of people affected each year by disasters such as floods and droughts in particular has increased greatly. The negative impact of natural disasters on the development of particularly vulnerable Third World countries can obviously be staggering. The recent Sub-Saharan famine crisis underscores the increasing number of people vulnerable to disasters brought about in part by environmental degradation. (The origins of the African famine are multiple and complex. The ecological deterioration experienced in wide regions of the continent, the rapid deforestation and growing desertification, contributed significantly to the onset of famine. It would seem apparent that environmental decline will continue and even accelerate in most areas.)

The recommended doubling of the annual disaster assistance appropriation would allow for a partial inflation adjustment and for a modest enhancement of the program in response to a much greater population at risk. Such an increase in the disaster assistance budget would allow for more effective U.S. Government response to the enormous suffering and dislocation caused worldwide by disasters and would allow more effective protection of the investment made in development efforts.

The $50 million contingency fund for extraordinary disaster crises is recommended as an improvement of the funding mechanisms now employed by AID to meet relief requirements in excess of the balance available in the OFDA account. Currently, when the OFDA account is depleted, borrowing authority permits a transfer from AID's development assistance accounts until supplemental appropriations are made by the Congress. Frequently, the development assistance accounts are permanently reduced by all or part of the borrowed amount, disrupting important programs and projects.

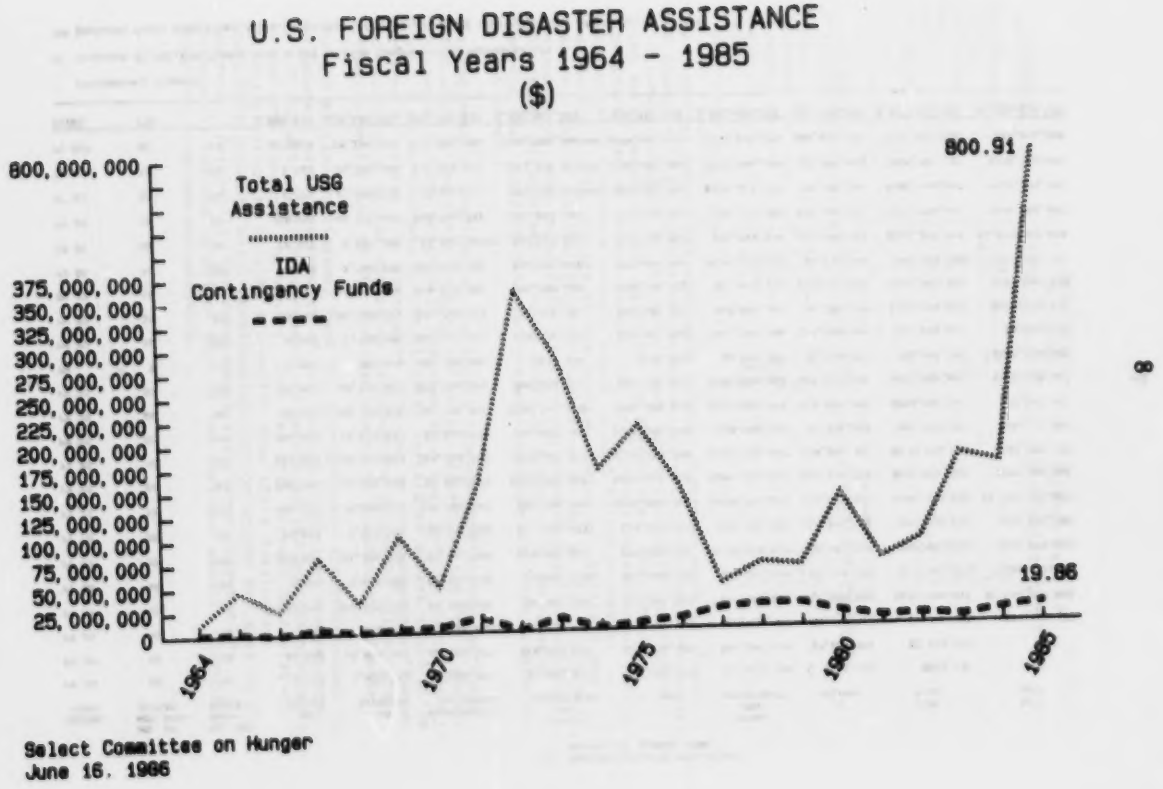
U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE
SUMMARY BY FISCAL YEAR

FISCAL YEAR	NO. OF NEW DES-ASTERS	NO. OF COUN-TRIES	NO. KILLED	NO. AFFECTED	CONTINGENCY IDA FUNDS	OTHER USG ASSISTANCE	PL 480	TOTAL USG ASSISTANCE	US VOLAGS	INTL CONV	SELF HELP
FY 64	29	23	3,112	3,992,241	$2,928,499	$3,305,441	$8,410,940	$11,646,100	$809,317	$833,795	-
FY 65	46	32	46,643	14,804,499	$2,436,871	$18,722,703	$20,213,459	$46,370,033	$3,427,301	$3,918,773	-
FY 66	46	36	7,044	4,672,248	$652,488	$1,036,740	$33,729,994	$28,421,102	$1,947,990	$9,476,383	$16,167,100
FY 67	57	40	17,441	104,419,973	$6,140,091	$6,142,586	$69,044,931	$81,369,868	$12,220,093	$172,660,911	$2,944,447,000
FY 68	46	36	3,044	5,021,382	$1,306,068	$9,009,711	$21,434,946	$32,000,724	$7,719,299	$15,943,626	$606,869,000
FY 69	37	32	1,018,634	31,311,680	$4,446,757	$24,622,542	$73,360,178	$102,419,477	$12,971,207	$93,496,628	$130,974,000
FY 70	50	36	72,918	8,518,309	$6,257,306	$11,868,973	$30,609,072	$48,735,432	$12,191,711	$89,515,671	$96,899,000
FY 71	51	40	622,183	70,289,001	$19,622,511	$21,932,750	$119,934,982	$157,592,243	$16,676,273	$266,639,252	$1,744,839,000
FY 72	29	27	115,381	13,436,549	$1,452,703	$210,289,607	$147,852,110	$359,544,420	$13,178,379	$410,661,043	$107,380,000
FY 73	30	27	111,614	217,756,063	$14,062,254	$150,631,043	$114,230,970	$284,925,267	$29,281,411	$200,892,708	$431,700,000
FY 74	30	19	101,600	12,819,240	$2,842,979	$31,827,690	$134,477,940	$168,948,609	$3,216,243	$90,252,901	$36,173,000
FY 75	39	23	41,233	44,310,234	$7,731,625	$120,540,500	$86,606,619	$215,080,644	$16,079,081	$263,430,683	$99,043,100
FY 76	54	32	77,642	38,340,279	$12,054,698	$99,233,131	$39,218,464	$150,504,683	$49,093,873	$338,424,628	$970,510,327
TQ	7	5	7,309	723,700	$8,479,248	$277,100	$402,676	$6,389,289	$1,139,554	$2,589,331	$190,900,000
FY 77	35	32	6,548	7,932,836	$21,448,529	$13,294,481	$11,909,226	$46,749,386	$14,390,449	$89,941,298	$6,040,894
FY 78	32	27	30,249	52,134,391	$24,498,847	$5,720,101	$42,021,193	$68,240,141	$6,224,223	$186,136,612	$276,946,722
FY 79	41	33	34,814	11,049,072	$24,554,441	$24,969,680	$18,318,812	$44,432,983	$39,420,510	$441,376,390	$477,044,108
FY 80	33	27	1,436	7,760,900	$14,068,800	$44,321,472	$67,614,688	$139,024,932	$1,333,448	$35,810,108	$11,847,900
FY 81	28	19	11,827	4,407,227	$9,089,042**	$49,230,142	$12,100,900	$70,419,224	$23,890,044	$211,844,949	$4,022,007,896
FY 82	36	29	43,262	40,463,621	$10,742,757	$61,032,084	$29,000,100	$90,774,941	$27,258,967	$237,092,847	$141,901,080
FY 83	43	34	4,775	43,980,670	$7,804,390	$83,388,147***	$87,333,943	$178,577,480	$2,482,734	$203,946,587	$119,800,332
FY 84	41	33	3,443	32,733,123	$18,098,027	$61,378,416***	$102,891,700	$149,368,143	$8,999,463	$236,757,189	$198,099,040
FY 85*	38	35	427,388	88,294,849	$19,063,048	$106,886,680***	$670,189,700	$800,918,234	$80,634,278	$961,987,220	$87,906,439
TOTAL	776		2,969,804	854,547,601	231,488,811	1,144,941,444	1,984,317,410	3,881,996,589	381,843,619	4,685,758,938	14,804,154,998

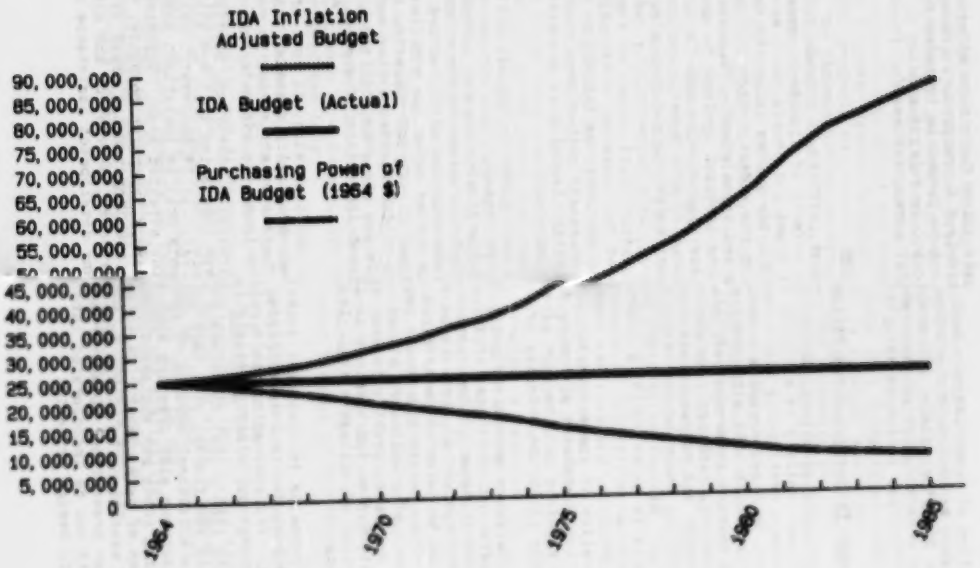
* Preliminary figures

** Includes $2,921,000 funded from a $80 million Congressional appropriation

*** Includes funds from other A.I.D. accounts and/or supplemental appropriations administered by OFDA


U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE
Fiscal Years 1964 - 1985
($)
800.91
19.86
Total USG Assistance
IDA Contingency Funds
800, 000, 000
375, 000, 000
350, 000, 000
325, 000, 000
300, 000, 000
275, 000, 000
250, 000, 000
225, 000, 000
200, 000, 000
175, 000, 000
150, 000, 000
125, 000, 000
100, 000, 000
75, 000, 000
50, 000, 000
25, 000, 000
0
1964
1970
1975
1980
1985
Select Committee on Hunger
June 16, 1986

INTERNATIONAL DISASTER ASSISTANCE ACCOUNT
Inflation Adjusted Purchasing Power Budget, 1964 - 1985
($)



Select Committee on Hunger
June 16, 1986

Creation of a contingency fund would allow for a more effective and reliable mechanism to guarantee timely U.S. response in case of a major disaster crisis; AID would not be forced to transfer funds from other programs; and response would not be delayed pending Congressional action on supplemental appropriations (as frequently is the case).

Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation

AID has made excellent, though modest, efforts to enhance developing countries' ability to mitigate the effects of disasters, specifically to prepare contingency operational plans and create early warning systems in disaster-prone areas. The Agency has attempted to provide training which will ultimately reach the widest number of disaster-prone country government officials and technicians. Food shortage forecasting, technical assistance and tropical cyclone forecasting, earthquake and volcano monitoring and risk studies and flood/storm forecasting comprise the primary focus of OFDA's early warning program. Mitigation programs include workshops and demonstration projects in safer building technology, crop vulnerability reduction and disease avoidance. A proportionately small amount of the annual appropriation, however, has been used for research, development and application of these programs. This has been due largely to the traditional emphasis placed by AID on relief rather than preparedness and mitigation and the lack of definitive legislative emphasis by Congress as to the priority of such programs.

Over the years emphasis rightly has been given to the alleviation of the suffering of victims of floods, earthquake and other natural and man-made disasters. One example of the disadvantage of a lack of preparedness and an emphasis on relief operations is the volcanic eruption in Colombia in 1985. A tremendous and costly effort was required to locate and rescue people buried under the mud flow; thousands of people were killed. Loss of life and property, however, could have been greatly reduced if a better warning system and evacuation plan had been put in place and properly utilized with evacuation of villagers after the first indication of serious volcanic activity.

It is becoming increasingly doubtful whether relief is cost-effective or the best way to help afflicted and chronically disaster-prone people. Professionals within relief agencies are coming to realize[2] that emergency relief <u>by itself</u> is no longer an adequate response.

It seems likely that disasters in developing countries, particularly droughts and floods, will take an ever increasing toll and will require additional amounts of donor aid. It is necessary that donor organizations stop treating such events only as logistical exercises of moving goods and equipment into the affected area. Disasters are problems of development. It is necessary, whenever possible, that relief assistance be linked to long-term improvements aimed at disaster prevention. Disaster preparedness, prevention and mitigation elements can be incorporated into many development assistance projects as basic design criteria.

The recommended amending of the Foreign Assistance Act to more definitively specify that disaster preparedness and mitigation elements be incorporated into development assistance strategies and project design is an attempt to ensure thorough consideration of disaster vulnerabilities on the part of AID. It is critical, for example, that irrigation projects not contribute to a lowering of the water table and ultimate desertification. It is critical that live stock enhancement projects not result in accelerated denudement of the ground cover. The recommendation underscores the necessity of examining such factors in the initial design of development projects as a priority consideration.

The recommended allocation of one third of the OFDA budget for disaster preparedness and mitigation activities would serve several objectives. It would properly emphasize disaster preparedness as an important aspect of the U.S. Government's development assistance efforts. It would reduce the human, financial and developmental toll extracted by disasters. And it would potentially reduce future expenditures for disaster relief operations.

Risk Assessment

The increasing vulnerability of millions of people to slowly developing, creeping disasters has been discussed. In Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, the specter of recurring famine is an on-going threat. It is clear that continuous monitoring of the food supply and the conditions that bring about the onset of famine is required for that region. The famine of 1984-86 was triggered by a three-to-five year drought. Despite the long-term development of the famine crisis, the U.S. Government and the international donor community were taken by surprise and were unprepared to respond to the crisis at hand. Numerous indicators that catastrophe was looming were not detected, or, if detected, were not acted upon. No U.S. Government agency had or accepted clear responsibility to monitor such a situation or to report on the overall deterioration in food security. Consequently, massive famine and outright human starvation affecting millions of people developed before interventions were launched. The relief efforts that followed were heroic, but for many victims of the famine that relief arrived too late.

A number of U.S. Government agencies have programs for monitoring and forecasting conditions that affect food supply around the world. Primarily, it is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and AID which manage these efforts. The Executive Branch has taken a number of steps to improve interagency coordination in this area. The most important appear to be AID's participation with USDA in the preparation of quarterly reports on food needs and availability. A major concern is the prospect that the current enthusiasm for interagency cooperation and coordination will dissipate when the current food crisis in Africa fades from attention.

A serious obstacle to making improvements in monitoring and forecasting is the lack of capacity in many developing cou tries to collect and analyze data on the food supply situation and make proper and timely food need assessments. Improving nationa systems for monitoring and forecasting drought and famine will requ ire training, technical assistance and financial aid from both bilateral and multilateral sources. It will involve enhancing the c pacity of developing countries to gather and analyze more convention l surface data on agriculture, including weather data, as well as de eloping their capacity to use advanced information technologies.

The prospect of increasingly frequent creeping disasters s ggest that we need new and more creative mechanisms and techniques t afford the United States Government adequate early warning of such ca astrophes before they occur. Such warning allows appropriate life- aving measures to take place rather than limiting U.S. actions o a response after the fact. Creeping disasters result in high mortal ty, social and economic dislocation and a general depletion of resou ces. It is vastly more complicated and expensive to provide rehabili ation after a disaster than it is to intervene during earlier stages f its development.

What is needed is a two-pronged effort: first, to develop coordinated and sophisticated "risk assessment" reporting mechanism that Congress will be aware in advance of impending potential long-term disasters; and secondly, sufficient emphasis on training and the development of the capacity within disaster-prone develo ng countries to adequately predict crop and food supply conditions an to calculate accurate needs assessments. The latter objective is an important aspect of disaster preparedness and mitigation programs iscussed earlier in this study.

The specific recommendation of the Select Committee is t at AID should be required to submit periodic (quarterly and as needed) risk assessments to the Congress on potential or creeping dis aster situations. That recommendation is based upon a convic ion that the worst manifestations of the 1984-86 African famine could e averted if avoided and that future tragedies of such magnitude can have been institutional responsibility is determined for effective monitoring of and reporting on such situations. The risk assessments should serve to alert the Congress and pertinent Executive Branch de artments of developing disaster situations anywhere in the world th t might require mobilization beyond AID's normal relief respons . More thorough and better coordinated disaster risk assessmen and reporting requirements, as well as the expanded disaster prepared ess and mitigation program called for in this study, entails an enhancement of the professional staff at the Office of U.S. Foreign Di aster Assistance. It will be necessary to involve other offi es within AID and other federal agencies in expanded efforts in these areas; OFDA should coordinate such efforts for institutional conti uity and memory.

Humanitarian Intent

Since its inception the foreign disaster assistance program of the United States Government has been intended for the relief of human suffering following or preceding natural or man-made disaster occurrences. The program has been tremendously successful in achieving its humanitarian goals. Victims of cyclones, fires, floods, earthquakes, volcanoes, drought and famine, civil strife, tsunamis, epidemics, chemical explosions and many other disasters have been assisted in every region of the world. Hundreds of civil defense officials in disaster-prone countries have been offered training. Countries have, with technical assistance from AID, produced disaster contingency plans that have benefitted countless numbers of people and avoided millions of dollars worth of damage by mitigating the effects of disasters.

There are, however, examples of disaster relief efforts being undertaken for objectives not clearly humanitarian. It would appear that policy objectives other than humanitarian concerns were being pursued in these situations. In other situations, AID has delayed making disaster relief aid available on a timely basis due to concern with overall political relationships with the government of the stricken country.

While it is unarguable that the disaster assistance program does promote U.S. foreign policy interests, it seems equally unarguable that to provide relief in an apolitical fashion is much more important for long-term American image and relationships with developing countries. If U.S. Government humanitarian disaster assistance aid is seen by other countries as a substitute for military aid or political assistance, it undermines the basic intent and objectives of efforts in this area.

The Select Committee recommends more definitive language in Section 491 of the Foreign Assistance Act which would specify that disaster assistance funds be spent only for humanitarian purposes, only to assist civilian populations, and that such assistance be given only on the basis of need without regard to political consideration to the greatest extent possible.

ADDITIONAL VIEWS

Additional views on the U.S. Government's Foreign Disaster Assistance Program were offered by Rep. Marge Roukema, Ranking Minority Member of the Select Committee on Hunger, and Reps. Bill Emerson, Sid Morrison, Cooper Evans and Robert Smith of Oregon. Those views are as follows:

In general we agree with the thrust of the Committee report. In an age when the U.S. commits suhbstantial resources to alleviate the suffering caused by natural disasters around the world, OFDA's ability to prepare for and respond to such disasters should be strengthened. We should take greater advantage of the technology and training now available to ameliorate the effects of these catastrophes. Such prepartion will help reduce the tragic number of fatalities which result from long-developing disasters, such as the African famine; and could well save significant amounts in U.S. foreign disaster assistance expenditures, which average well above the $25 million appropriated to OFDA each year.

1) The report recommends a doubling of the OFDA annual appropriation of $25 million (Administration request level) to $50 million. We find this a laudable attempt to set OFDA funding as a priority within the foreign assistance budget. However, at a time when Congress is struggling to meet budget reduction targets, it is unrealistic to call for the doubling of this account while many other equally important programs face cutbacks. At the same time, we find that the U.S. response to foreign disasters could be significantly impaired if OFDA's annual appropriation is reduced from its traditional level of $25 million, the amount it has been granted each year since the inception of OFDA in 1964.

2) The report recommends the establishment of a $50 million contingency fund, replenishable as needed, from which OFDA could draw to meet immediate and unforeseen disaster needs not covered by the regular OFDA appropriation. The report maintains that this would lessen the need for OFDA to borrow from other AID accounts. These accounts often remain depleted through the end of the fiscal year, because of Congressional failure to replenish them through a supplemental appropriation.

We maintain that the establishment of such a fund is unnecessary, because of OFDA's authority to borrow from other AID accounts. It is the position of the Agency and various development theorists that disasters are often the result of failed development strategies, therefore a portion of development assistance funds should be tapped in responding to foreign disasters. We note, however, that Congress should be awre of the need to replenish the funds borrowed from other AID accounts by OFDA, whether or not requests to do so come from the Administration. To leave such annual depletion unresolved, risks allowing a systematic decline of our development activities overseas.

3) The report recommends mandating at least one-third of OFDA's annual appropriation for disaster mitigation and preparedness activities. We oppose the earmarking of such small amounts of money as a general principle and regard this particular set-aside as an undue constraint on OFDA's needed flexibility. However, we encourage OFDA to make a strong commitment to expending at least one-third of its annual budget on disaster mitigation and preparedness activities, and recommend that those funds not be diverted to other uses. Should OFDA consistenly disregard or reduce spending on mitigation activities, then we would feel compelled to recommend that Congress specify an appropriate amound for such activities each year.

4) The report recommends language in the Foreign Assistance Act that more clearly defines the purposes for which disaster funds should be spent. This would strengthen the humanitarian intent of the law by specifying that disaster funds should assist civilian populations only and that such assistance be given on the basis of need without regard to political considerations. We are uncertain how this could be specified in legislative language without unduly complicating the disaster assistance process.

ANNEXES

NOTES

1. U.S. Agency for International Development, Annual Report, FY 1984; Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance. Washington, D.C. p.1.

2. Anders Wijkman and Lloyd Timberlake, Natural Disasters: Acts of God and Acts of Man? (London: Earthscan Press, 1984), P. 104.

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